

### 3.0 USENET NEWS (NEWSGROUPS)

Usenet News (Newsgroups) is a bulletin-board style application for making announcements and holding extended conversations between users. It is implemented as a network of news servers that pass articles between each other. Articles are accessed via client software that the user executes locally (i.e., on the computer that he or she is logged onto).

The user has two client programs available for Newsgroups:

- xrn
- tin

Both launch icons are labeled **ReadNews**, but the xrn icon has an “**X**” in it (X-based readnews) while tin has the word “**text**” in its icon (text-based readnews).

This section describes the basic user operations available in xrn and tin (read news article, post articles, subscribe to newsgroups, etc). UNIX-style man pages for each of these programs are supplied with their segments.

#### 3.1 Overview of Newsgroups

A Newsgroups article is a text file that is distributed between the news servers and then made available to users reading that particular newsgroup. The format of an article is a header followed by an empty line, then the article body. Figure 3-1 contains a sample article. (The header of the article consists of the lines with the format “header-type: header-value.”) The header of an article is used to:

- Identify the article.
- Determine where to transmit an article.
- Determine in which newsgroups the article is to appear.

The body of an article can contain any text the user wants (including empty lines). In the example in Figure 3-1, the article was posted to the newsgroup “test” with the subject “testing again.”

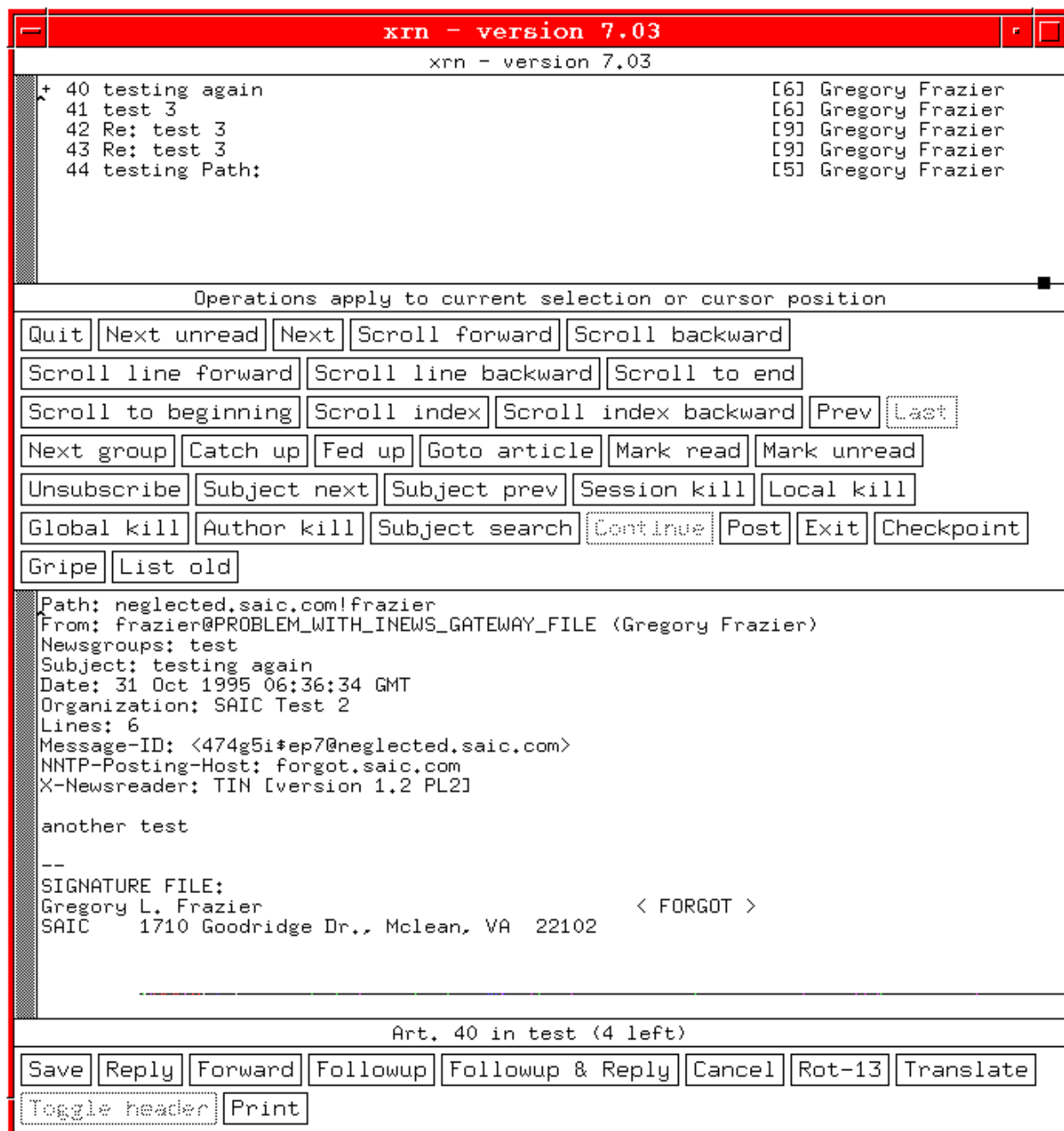


Figure 3-1. Reading a NEWS article

**3.1.1 Connecting to a News Server.** When a user double-clicks on the launch icon for either **xrn** or **tin**, a menu of up to five news servers available to connect to is displayed. A newsreader program must connect to a news server chosen from the menu to allow the user to view articles or submit articles to the GCCS News network. The news servers listed in the menu comprise servers to which the user has connected in the past, and servers the segment installer specified as usable by the local news-reading community.

If the server to which the user wants to connect is not listed, the user selects the **other** button and enters the server's name. This action connects the user to the specified news server, sends the user-name to the news server, and displays a screen requesting a news password. This password (which is not the UNIX password) allows the user access to the news server. The user is then allowed access to the news server.



Figure 3-2. Connecting to a News Server

Step 1. Select a News Server.

Step 2. Enter a newsgroup password—do not enter your UNIX login password. If you need a password, contact the news administrator for the server. If you do not know how to reach them, try sending e-mail to user news at the desired news server.

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**NOTE:** To connect without a password, press <return> leaving the password field blank.

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To enter a newsgroup:

Step 1. Double-Click the appropriate newsreader icon.

Step 2. Select the server to which you wish to connect.

Step 3. Enter news password.

**3.1.2 Entering a Newsgroup.** Once the correct password is entered and the news server has accepted the connection, then a new window is displayed (see Figure 3-3). At this point, both xrn and tin give the user the option of subscribing to new newsgroups (i.e., newsgroups which were created since the last time the user read news).

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**NOTE:** The user is only presented with newsgroups that will allow access (i.e., no newsgroups are displayed to which the server will then deny access).

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The newsgroups to which the user is subscribed are displayed with the number of articles in each newsgroup that the user has not yet read. At this point, the user can perform “normal”

newsreading functions. First-time news users should view all newsgroups **All Groups** button for xrn, <y> for Tin), select newsgroups to subscribe to, and then rescan the newsgroups (rescan button for xrn, <Y> for Tin).

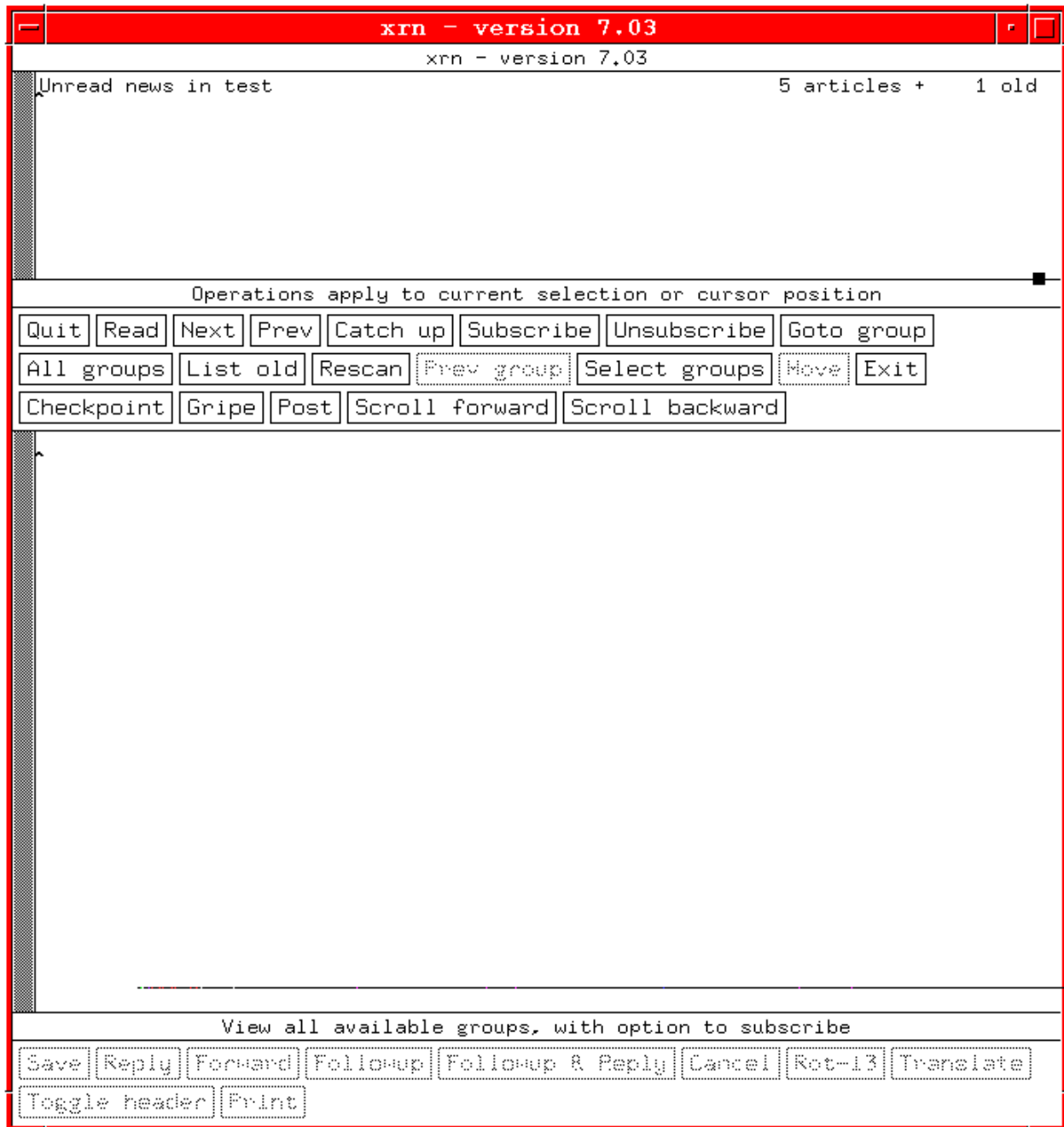


Figure 3-3. XRN Initial Screen

## 3.2 Performing Specific Tasks within Newsgroups

**3.2.1 How to read news.** Both xrn and tin allow a user to select a news group from the screen listing available newsgroups. To read news:

- Step 1. Select a new group from the news groups listed on the screen.
- Step 2. Use the up and down arrow keys to move the cursor from one newsgroup to another. (Xrn also supports the **Next** and **Prev** buttons; tin supports the vi movement keys <j> and <k> for down and up, respectively.
- Step 3. Press the **Read** button in xrn or <tab> in tin to read the first unread article in the newsgroup.

The article in Figure 3-1 begins with a header, which contains information that can be useful to the reader. The header begins with the “Path:” line and ends with the “X-Newsreader” line. The path indicates the sender and the series of news servers through which the article passed to arrive at the local server. The “Newsgroup:” line identifies the newsgroup in which the article resides. Below the “X-Newsreader” line is the text of the message. In Figure 3-1 the text is limited to the comment “another test.” This particular example includes a signature that was automatically appended to the article. To include a signature automatically, it is necessary to have a *signature* file in the user’s home directory.

**3.2.2 What is a Thread.** Newsgroup conversations are created by people responding to articles previously posted to the newsgroup. In News, a conversation is called a “thread” (as in the thread of a conversation). A thread is identified by the subject line of a news article—articles with the same subject line (possibly preceded by the string “RE:”) are part of the same thread. Both xrn and tin support “threading” by grouping articles within a newsgroup on the basis of their subject line.

**3.2.3 How to Post an Article.** In xrn, the **Post** button brings the user into a text editor with an article skeleton (see Figure 3-4). In tin, pressing <w> does the same. The article skeleton is a partially-completed header and, if the user has a signature file (*signature*) in their home directory, it has the user’s signature. For an article to be successfully posted, it must have valid “Newsgroups:” and “Subject:” headers. (Tin prompts the user for a subject line before opening the editor, and both xrn and tin will fill in the newsgroups if the user is posting from within a newsgroup.) The body of the article can be composed in the text editor, or the user may include a previously-composed text file. Once the user is satisfied that the article is complete, it can be posted. In xrn, this is done by pressing the **Send** button at the bottom of the edit window. In tin, this is done by saving the file and exiting the editor (if the editor is vi, the command is “:wq”—see Subsection 3.2.6 if you do not wish to use vi).

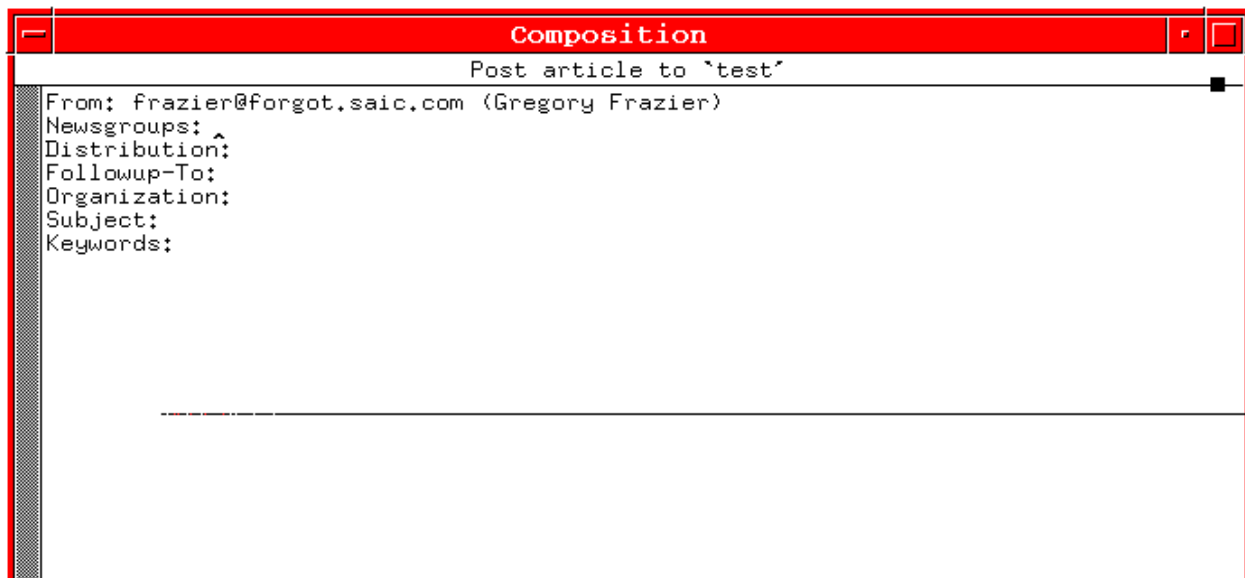


Figure 3-4. Article Skeleton

**3.2.4 How to Post a Followup to an Article.** A followup is an article posted in response to another article—followups are the basis for threading. Both xrn and tin support posting followups.

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| <p>Step 1. While reading an article, press the <b>Followup</b> button (xrn) or &lt;F&gt; (tin) to post an article with the same subject line as the article currently being read.</p> <p>Step 2. If you want to include the text of the previous article in the followup, press the <b>Include Article</b> button (xrn). In tin, press &lt;f&gt; (instead of &lt;F&gt;) to include some of the text from the original article. (Edit the included text to minimize repetition and maximize clarity.)</p> <p>Step 3. Once the article is complete, it can be posted. In xrn, post an article by pressing the <b>Send</b> button at the bottom of the edit window. In tin, an article is posted when you save the file and exit the editor. See Subsection 3.2.6 to use an editor other than vi.</p> |
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**3.2.5 How to Send E-mail to an Article's Author.** Both xrn and tin support composing and sending an e-mail message to the author of an article. The process is similar to following up a posting (see Subsection 3.2.4). To send e-mail:

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| <p>Step 1. Read the message.</p> <p>Step 2. Press the <b>Reply</b> button (xrn), or &lt;R&gt; or &lt;r&gt; (tin). The newsreader program fills in the "To:" header of the e-mail message based on the header of the article to which the user is replying.</p> |
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Step 3. Modify the “To:” line or add a “cc:” line to send the response to any address or addresses.

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**NOTE:** Xrn supports simultaneously following up and replying to an article. This feature will be added to tin in a future release.

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**3.2.6 How to Specify the Editor to use for Posting Articles.** The default editor for tin is vi. The system administrator can change the editor by modifying the environment variable \$VISUAL to name the desired editor. For example, to make Open Windows Text Editor the default editor:

- Using the c-shell:

```
setenv VISUAL /usr/openwin/bin/textedit
```

- Using either the Bourne shell or the Korn shell:

```
set VISUAL /usr/openwin/bin/textedit
export VISUAL
```

- Edit the file `~/.tin/.tinrc` and change the line:

```
default_editor_format: %E+%N %F
```

to

```
default_editor_format: %E %F
```

**3.2.7 How to Subscribe to a Newsgroup.** When xrn or tin is called, the program checks to see if there are any new newsgroups that were created since the last time the user read news. If new newsgroups exist, the user has the option to subscribe to them. In addition, both programs allow users to subscribe or unsubscribe to newsgroups while working in the newsgroups window.

Step 1. Press **All Groups** (xrn) to display a list of all available newsgroups; press <y> (tin) for all available newsgroups.

Step 2. In xrn there are subscribe and unsubscribe options. In tin press <s> to subscribe and <u> to unsubscribe to any newsgroups.

**3.2.8 How to be Given Access to a News Server or to a Newsgroup.** Contact the news administrator of the server in question to be given access to newsgroups on that server. If you are given a point of contact (POC) for a particular newsgroup, then contact the POC directly rather than sending e-mail to a news administrator.

When the news server software is installed on a machine, an e-mail alias is created on that machine for the user news. For example, if the news server is installed on

*delphi.forscom.smil.mil*, then e-mail sent to *news@delphi.forscom.smil.mil* will be automatically forwarded to the news administrators at FORSCOM.

**3.2.9 How to Cancel an Article.** News supports the ability to cancel (un-post) articles. You can only cancel an article that you posted, and you can only do it when connected to the same server on which you posted the article.

Step 1. Read the article you want to cancel.

Step 2. Press the **Cancel** button (xrn) or press <D> (tin).

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**NOTE:** These steps will remove the article from the GCCS News network; however, some people may have already had the opportunity to read it.

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**3.2.10 How to Specify the Lifespan of an Article.** An article posted to News is not available indefinitely for reading. Eventually, a news server will "expire" the article, removing it from the server. As part of its configuration, each server has a minimum, a maximum, and a default lifespan for articles. This configuration is on a per-server and per-newsgroup basis. There will be times when a user posting an article will want to specify a lifespan for an article that may differ from the lifespan specified on the server(s). For example, if the article refers to an event happening on a specific day, the user may wish for the article to expire on that day (i.e., to not be expired before that day, and to not be available for reading after that day).

Step 1. Insert an "Expires:" header (i.e., above the empty line above the article's body) the order of the headers does not matter). The line looks like "Expires: *date*," where *date* is either an absolute date such as "8/14/95" or "14 Aug 1995" or a relative date and time such as "3 days" or "4 weeks."

Step 2. Post the article.

**3.2.11 How to Search for a Specific Article.** Currently you can search on an article subject or author. Searches are not case sensitive and will match sub-strings. Xrn provides **Search Subject** and **Search Author** buttons. Tin supports searching forward and backwards on subject (</> and <?>) and for author (<a> and <A>).

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**NOTE:** The capability to search for an article based upon an author+newsgroup+date+time specification, where date+time are the "Date:" header of the article (i.e., when the article was first published) will be available in a future version.

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**3.2.12 How to Locate an Article That No Longer Exists on your Server.** News articles are not usually posted on a news server indefinitely (your news administrator can make exceptions). However, your site may be archiving the newsgroup in which the article you are searching for was posted. If an article was archived, your news administrator should be able to retrieve it for you.



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**NOTE:** A news-archive reader will be available in a future GCCS Teleconferencing application suite. When it is available, you will be able to use your web browser (either Mosaic or Netscape) to access your or another site's news archive.

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